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2019

## "Just don't call it boot camp": Implementing intensive dissertation writing experiences

Vicki R. Kennell

*Purdue University*, [vkennell@purdue.edu](mailto:vkennell@purdue.edu)

Mitch Hobza

*Purdue University*, [mhobza@purdue.edu](mailto:mhobza@purdue.edu)

Michelle M. Campbell

*Duke University*, [michelle.m.campbell@duke.edu](mailto:michelle.m.campbell@duke.edu)

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Vicki R. Kennell & Mitch Hobza (Purdue Writing Lab) & Michelle M. Campbell (Duke University)  
“Just don’t call it boot camp”: Implementing intensive dissertation writing experiences,  
Roundtable, IWCA 2019, Columbus, OH.

## Notes:

### Vicki (2-3 min. max)

- What’s in a name? Why we don’t call it a bootcamp.
  - World Wide Words: The term *boot camp* “derives from a slightly older slang term *boot* for a recruit in basic training or an inexperienced enlisted man, on record from 1911.” <http://www.worldwidewords.org/qa/qa-boo4.htm> [by the time you run a dissertation event, I’m not sure the writers should be considered inexperienced or still in basic training!]
  - OED: boot camp n. *U.S. slang* a centre for the initial training of American naval or Marine recruits. 1944 G. P. Bailey *Boot; a Marine in the Making* Foreword Marine inductees are called ‘Boots’ and it is Marine Corps custom to send them all through a grim process called ‘boot camp’. [I hope we aren’t aiming to create and deliver a “grim process.”]
  - Merriam Webster includes the following terms in the definition of boot camp: disciplinary facility, rigidly structured, initiation, and either military or offenders [connotations here are of punitive action and hazing rather than mentoring]
  - Boot camps in images--groups of people all doing exactly the same thing at the same time, lots of yelling and sweating, people having their faces pushed into the mud while the more experienced folks laugh, etc. [I should hope our events don’t call to mind images like that!]
  - So what should we call it?
    - Intensive Writing Experiences for Dissertation Writers (IWEs)--descriptive label
    - Dissertation Institute or Academy--emphasize the educational aspect
    - Or,??

### Mitch (5 minutes)

- Context: Purdue
  - Application process--advisor signature required
  - Summer 2018 (4, 3-day sessions)
    - 80 total attendees (53 drafting; 27 revising; mix of international and domestic)
    - 44 disciplines represented, a mix of humanities, social sciences, and STEM
    - Staff costs: 2 instructors (1 experienced with grad events, 1 new to grad events) + Associate Director general support (explain)
    - Food cost (lunch and snacks) \$14.84 per person per day
  - Summer 2019 (4, 3-day sessions; switched the order of drafting & revising)

- 61 total attendees (36 drafting; 25 revising; mix of international and domestic)
- 38 disciplines represented, a mix of humanities, social sciences, and STEM
- Staff costs: 1 experienced instructor (Mitch, from previous summer) & a rotation of 3 new to IWEs (one to two per week) + Associate Director general support
- Food cost (lunch and snacks) \$16.45 per person per day
- Evaluations from both years indicated similar things (in parentheses, 1st info is 2018; 2nd info is 2019)
  - Progress made on the dissertation (9,000 words in 3 days; 10 pages in 3 days)
  - Relational support provided (of incredible value to find a community going through exactly the same process; hearing from others that they have struggles with their writing or dissertation too)
  - Skills learned (great advice for overcoming procrastination; reverse outlining and sentence structure. I haven't addressed either in years.)
  - Value of the program for other grad students (this needs to be offered twice a semester for all levels of graduate students; it is an intrinsic part of my educational process at Purdue, and I am so thankful for being able to attend. Every graduate student should be forced to attend! It is an intrinsic part of my educational process at Purdue, and I am so thankful for being able to attend. Every graduate student should be forced to attend!)
- Helpful aspects of the event as shared informally & verbally
  - This type of support was lacking on campus, including from their advisors (?)

### **Michelle (5 minutes)**

- Context: Duke
  - July 2019
    - The Intensive Writing Experience (IWE) was a 2-day intensive writing retreat for PhD students at the dissertation phase open only to advanced PhD students in the Pratt School of Engineering.
    - An application process was required with advisor approval for participation.
    - The July 2019 IWE had 7 attendees, 6 of whom were from BME, and 1 of whom was from ECE.
    - Attendees were required to attend 2 days from 9:30am-4:30pm. Each day began with an hour-long workshop, 2 hours of morning writing time, provided lunch, and 2 hours of afternoon writing time.
      - Day 1 workshop was goal-setting
      - Day 2 workshop was revising (paragraph organization/structure, topic sentences, transitions)

- The entire IWE is supported by research-based best practices about graduate writing that include a goal-setting journal to develop specific and manageable goals and promulgate self-awareness.
- Overall Attendee Evaluations
  - **100%** of attendees rated the IWE as “Excellent” overall.
  - **85%** of attendees rated the IWE structure, time, and facilitator as “Excellent.” The other attendee rated it as “Good” because the attendee would have preferred the IWE be longer (5 days instead of 2 days)
  - **100%** of attendees would encourage other PhD students at the dissertation phase to participate in a future IWE.
- Testimonial quotes from attendees
  - “The IWE gave me resources, structure, and feedback that made writing my thesis less daunting. I feel more prepared to do it and less anxious. It was great to be around peers while writing. I feel less isolated and more supported.”
  - “[The] IWE made me realize writing can be broken down into manageable chunks with very short-term goals. It is do-able.”
  - “I was very happy with my IWE experience, it has changed how I think about planning my writing and my outlook on accomplishing large tasks in general. I cannot recommend this more highly.”
  - “The IWE program helped me to set up a writing routine that increase[d] my productivity without exhausting me.”
  - “[The IWE taught] me how to be an efficient writer.”
- Program Resources Utilized
  - 2-4 Communications Consultants for workshops and one-on-one consultations during writing times
  - 2 days of lunches, approximately \$280
  - 2 days of snacks, approximately \$20

### **Michelle & Vicki (5 minutes)**

- Curriculum & Results (**Michelle can start here**)
  - Goal setting--all groups
  - Global lesson followed by morning writing time (2 hours)
  - Local lesson followed by afternoon writing time (2 hours)
  - Drafting
    - Genre Analysis/CARS
    - Sentence templates
    - Paragraph organization related to purpose
    - Transition words
  - Revising
    - Reverse Outlining
    - Coding for sentence variety
    - Flow
  - Getting Started (Fall break once) (**Vicki can start here**)

- Four types of knowledge (content, genre, administrative, self)
- Roadmap of the entire project (genre knowledge)
- Setting a production schedule (administrative knowledge)
- Writing inventory (self-knowledge)
- Overcoming roadblocks
- Setting goals
- Local lessons (2019 innovation) (ended up the same for both session types)
  - Concision
  - Punctuation
  - Sentence combining

### **Mitch (5 minutes)**

- Things that affect program success
  - Timing (e.g., revision with respect to summer deadlines for depositing/defending)
    - Note--this was a big issue at Duke. A lot of engineering students were unavailable during the summer (many were traveling or doing internships).
  - Group dynamics (e.g., a group composed of primarily civil engineers vs. one with more humanities folks; one bad apple spoils the bunch, etc.)
  - Location (e.g., windows, temperature, enough space, enough outlets)
  - Context (e.g., differences between Purdue & Duke....)

### **All of us (35 minutes?)**

- Large group discussion
  - If it's a huge audience, split into 3 groups and each talk with one group
  - Format/structure of IWEs
  - Curriculum & Rationale
  - Things to remember
  - Things that didn't work & why